

Accelerating action on NCDs



To mark the end of 2024, we wanted to reconnect with everyone who participated in or engaged with our event Leading on NCDs held in Canberra on 1 November. We have been busy digesting the discussion, planning our advocacy in 2025 and broadening our engagement, including with our neighbours in the Pacific. In the following pages you can find a brief recap of the event.

One of the key messages that hit home from the workshop was how powerful it was to connect with a broad range of stakeholders who are active in the chronic disease space. It was remarked that this was perhaps the first time that such an event has been held in Australia – but there is a clear need to continue that cross-sector collaboration to keep building a strong movement for action on chronic disease.

With that in mind, we'd like to continue to engage you in what we are calling the 'Friends of NCDs'; an informal network of like-minded groups and individuals advocating for accelerated action on NCDs. We hope you will continue with us on the journey – and look forward to continued collaboration to build momentum for change.

Wishing you the best for the holiday season,

Veronica Le Nevez (The George Institute) and *Lucy Westerman* (ACDPA)

Addressing NCDs: global collaboration and local action

It's been nearly seven years since the last UN High-Level Meeting about chronic diseases. The years since have been marred by a global pandemic, conflicts and geopolitical upheavals, and intensifying climate change. Achieving broad consensus for action on NCDs, both in Australia and in the international community, has never been more challenging.

And yet, it is plain that NCDs are now the biggest global health challenge, and we need to bring together our expertise and influence to drive action forward – both within our own countries and on the global stage.

Recognising the need for collective action we recently co-hosted a cross-sectoral workshop inviting stakeholders from across Australia and our Pacific neighbours, to set the stage for discussing priorities and planning action in the lead up to the next high-level meeting in September 2025.



A United Approach: Workshop Insights

Our workshop in November 2024 focused on how Australia can lead the way forward at home and internationally. We convened representatives from Australia and Pacific nations to explore strategies for addressing NCDs through a lens of equity and cultural sensitivity.

Key themes emerged, highlighting the need to include First Nations leadership, increase our focus and resourcing of prevention, and enhance global collaboration to drive down health disparities.

Centring and applying Indigenous knowledges

Addressing the cultural determinants of health For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, connection, kinship and country are central to their worldview and are deeply intertwined with health and identity. Indigenous knowledge and practices, nurtured over generations, have protected communities for thousands of years. These knowledges remain highly relevant today.

The workshop underscored the necessity of recognising the cultural determinants of health in order to deliver better health policies and interventions. In the Australian context, reconciliation was presented as a continuous process of truth-telling and recognition, with the recent referendums marking steps toward a shared understanding.



Chronic Disease Burden in Australia and the Pacific

Indigenous Australians and Pacific Islander communities face disproportionate rates of largely avoidable illness and death from kidney disease, obesity, diabetes and other NCDs. Poor healthcare access, compounded by economic and geographic barriers, worsens outcomes for these conditions.

Community-driven health models, such as the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health sector, have demonstrated success in fostering trust and cultural alignment. Examples from East Timor and Fiji reiterated that strengthening capacity of communities to deliver preventive and care services is essential for improved health outcomes and sustainability. Expanding funding and support for health system strengthening is essential for long-term, sustainable health improvements.



Global Perspectives and Collaboration

Australia is uniquely positioned to collaborate with neighbouring countries in addressing shared NCD challenges. Hypertension, diabetes, and diverse forms of malnutrition are widespread issues across the Indo-Pacific, requiring collaborative strategies and resource-sharing.

Globally, only a fraction of health budgets is allocated to NCD prevention, despite these diseases being significant contributors to poverty and inequality. In Australia the proportion of federal health funding invested broadly in prevention is well below the target of 5%.

Meanwhile although Australia's development assistance for health includes NCDs and prevention, this pales in comparison to supporting progress on other acute and infectious disease priorities. Workshop participants called for a re-balancing of priorities, urging global leaders to increase investment in 'best buys' measures to prevent the onset and progression of NCDs, and foster international partnerships.

Strategies for Progress

Effective NCD prevention demands an integrated approach, addressing social, economic, and cultural factors that underpin and drive disease burden. For example, policies targeting marketing of unhealthy products, ensuring availability and access to nutritious food, public health promotion campaigns, and health-sensitive regional trade considerations, illustrating the cross-portfolio nature of prevention, emerged as components of a comprehensive strategy.

Participants from Australia and overseas made the case for stronger laws and enforcement for regulating unhealthy products, including reformulation, labelling, marketing, and fiscal policies such as health levies on sugary drinks and alcohol. Concurrently, raising public awareness and health literacy, a stronger focus on prevention and ensuring access to healthcare is crucial.

Looking Ahead to 2025 and Beyond

The insights and strategies developed during the workshop will serve as a foundation for advocacy ahead of the 2025 UN HLM on NCDs and Mental Health.

In the new year we will be in touch with further details about our advocacy and opportunities to engage and contribute.

We look forward to continuing engagement with chronic disease and mental health communities in early 2025 as we work toward ensuring the year is an acceleration point for health and wellbeing in our region.

